

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

STEVE BULLOCK
GOVERNOR



Angela McLean
LT. GOVERNOR

May 21, 2014

Dear Superintendents and Principals:

We're writing to ask you to help end childhood hunger in Montana. It may sound quite ambitious, but there is a simple way you can help achieve this goal.

Adopting the community eligibility provision (CEP) of the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act for the 2014-2015 School Year will help eligible serve free school meals to all students, regardless of income. You can join by signing the enclosed form and sending it back to the Office of Public Instruction.

COMMUNITY ELIGIBILITY

More than one-hundred schools in Montana are eligible for reimbursement from the USDA for universal free breakfast and lunch (as determined by the Healthy Kids Act of 2010, for schools with between 40 and 62.5 percent eligible students). That number is calculated by multiplying 1.6 by the number of identified eligible students for each school.

This opportunity means that every student at eligible schools will have access to school-provided breakfast and lunch. By simply signing the enclosed documents, your school is signed up for community eligibility.

HOW COMMUNITY ELIGIBILITY WORKS

CEP is the newest opportunity for schools with high percentages of low-income children to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students. CEP increases participation in school meal programs, reduces labor costs for schools and increases federal reimbursements. In short, it allows for a healthier student body and a healthier school meal budget. CEP also reduces the district's paperwork and school meal administrative costs because there is no need to collect school meal applications.

Across the country, CEP has already made it easier for thousands of schools to offer free meals to their students. After the first two years of implementation in seven states, families and administrators at more than 2,000 schools welcomed the opportunity to reduce child hunger. In schools that have participated in CEP for two years, lunch participation has increased by 13 percent and breakfast participation has increased by 25 percent.

We know that you understand the importance of this opportunity. We do, however, want to express how important we feel universal free breakfast is, and more specifically, how important offering an alternative model, like breakfast-after-the-bell, is in increasing breakfast participation rates and reducing stigma for low-income children. Plus, schools that implement universal breakfast-after-the-bell programs have been shown to have students improve by 17.5 percent on standardized math tests. Signing up for CEP can help achieve similar outcomes in Montana.

WHAT SCHOOLS and DISTRICTS CAN DO

We know that eligible schools will be happy with community eligibility. In fact, the Food Research and Action Center found that 100 percent of surveyed districts that had implemented community eligibility would recommend it. Districts reported positive feedback from parents and school staff and an increased ability to feed more children. Many districts also reported an increase in federal funding through the school nutrition programs.

No child should go hungry in Montana. Your participation in CEP will be instrumental in our fight to end childhood hunger.

Our staff stand by to help your school navigate any piece of the application or to answer any questions. They can be reached at 406-444-2501. **The deadline for submission to OPI is June 30th, so we ask that you turn in your application before then.** We'll be in touch in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,



STEVE BULLOCK
Governor



ANGELA MCLEAN
Lt. Governor



DENISE JUNEAU
Superintendent of Public Schools



LISA BULLOCK
First Lady